

Minutes of the 7th SG Meeting of PA9

Date: 15-16 May 2014

Place: European Training Foundation, Turin, Italy

Participants: see attached list

- **Welcome and Introduction**

Faudel (ETF) welcomes SG on behalf of the European Training Foundation. Hanak (AT) and Schick (AT) welcome the SG members and in particular the new members (CZ: Michala Bernkopfová, SI: Mateja Gornik-Mrvar, ETF: Georgios Zisimos) and emphasize the close link between PA9 and the work of ETF. Hanak and Schick (AT) mention that the continuity within the SG of PA9 is of utmost importance in order to make the implementation of PA9 a success thereby ensuring the ownership by the DR countries, in particular by the Non-EU member states such as Ukraine and Moldova.

Faudel (ETF) gives a short overview of the vision and the main activities of ETF. Faudel (ETF) states that the vision of ETF is to make vocational education and training in the partner countries a driver for lifelong learning and sustainable development, with a special focus on competitiveness and social cohesion.

- **Adoption of Agenda**

Schick (AT) states that the quorum is fulfilled according to the guidelines for the functioning of the Steering Group with 8 out of 14 countries. Agenda is unanimously adopted by the SG.

- **Reform priorities in education & labour market policy in each country**

Hanak (AT):

The Austrian Labour market is doing relatively well referring to the EU 2020 objectives. A main challenge is to raise the participation in employment for elderly people. Referring to the raise of the mandatory retiring age de jure as required by EC (up to 67), Hanak (AT) states that changing the law in Austria makes only sense if the retiring age is also achieved in reality (de facto).

Concerning labour market measures for young people Hanak refers to the "Youth Guarantee" which ensures that in the first 4 month of unemployment there will be some kind of counselling or training to raise the qualification of young people. "Youth Guarantee"-like measures are already obligatory in Austria with the aim to reduce the dropout of young people. The Austrian model played a major role in shaping the European regulation.

The dual system (VET) used in Austria / Germany seems of interest for other member and non-member states.

Schick (AT):

A new coalition government was formed in December 2013. As of March 2014, the Ministry is responsible for Education and Women's Affairs. Austria is implementing a major structural reform in the education system, will be continued and consolidated in accordance with the new work programme 2013-18. The reform measures that were rolled

out range from early-childhood education to lifelong learning with the aim to enhance education outcomes and concern i.a. the following: reduction of the number of students in classes, reform of teacher education, new legislation on the employment and payment of teachers and educational standards. The overall policy focus is on both quality and equity. A special emphasis is attached to measures aiming at disadvantaged young people with difficult socio-economic background, through preventive, intervention and compensation measures. In the coming period, central measures and commitments will concern the further development of comprehensive language support schemes, in particular at the interface between kindergartens and primary schools, the expansion of all-day school places and the provision of second-chance education.

Rolli / Kazich (DE):

Education in Baden-Württemberg is a matter of state (not federal level). The Priorities are quite similar to the ones of Austria (such as early childhood education; reform of teacher education, all-day schooling, support of disadvantaged, inclusion etc.)

Bernkopfová (CZ):

Current topics of discussion are for instance the position of teacher (i.e. prestige, salary), the attractiveness of VET; the attractiveness of tertiary school (i.e. increased tendency to attend tertiary school) and the challenge of few kindergartens. In addition, it is also discussed to support inclusive education with the aim that socially weaker groups have access to education.

Maravic (HR):

Croatia is dealing with the topic of the European Qualification Framework. It is also being discussed the reform of the funding of public institutions (i.e. performance-based funding). Other topics are the Draft Strategy of Education, Science and Sports 2020 (to be adopted in July 2014).

Kasparyan (BG):

Bulgaria is facing several challenges such as severe brain drain (i.e. several sectors are experiencing a lack of skilled workforce). Other concerns are the reduction of drop-out / early school leavers, the prestige of teachers and the gradually increase of the pension age (discussion on-going).

Tölgyes (HU):

The improvement of employment level (i.e. long-term unemployed people are undereducated or have no education at all), the support of Life Long Learning, the support of the dual training system, the increase of the attractiveness of VET and the issue of unemployment of Roma people are current issues in Hungary.

Auxtová (SK):

Slovakia is dealing with similar issues such as the increase of the unemployment rate which is in particular high for disadvantaged people. In addition Slovakia is also pursuing the objective to integrate elements of dual education in the legislation. Moreover, the BSc in higher education should be more oriented to labour market.

Preoteasa / Vladut (RO):

The structural funds have proven to be a huge challenge for Romania, but hoping to be an opportunity for the future. Specific topics in Romania are for instance the early school drop-out, the increase of the attractiveness of VET and the duration of VET school (up to 3 years). Furthermore, Romania is dealing with the increase of the attractiveness of work-

based learning, the increase of initial VET quality assurance and the provision of a training programme for teachers.

Schick (AT) proposes to include a tour de table of "Reform priorities in education & labour market policy in each country" once in a year in the framework of the SG meetings.

- **Governance of EU macro-regional strategies**

Krabatsch (EC) gives a short introduction about the progress regarding the issue of the governance of the EU macro-regional strategies. The main needs for the governance of macro-regional strategies (MRS) such as EUSDR are stronger political leadership and the clarity in the organization of MRS. A four level approach is recommended that consists of 1) political leadership (who gives strategic direction?), 2) coordination (how to manage the overall implementation?), 3) implementation and (who leads day-to-day implementation?) 4) ownership (how to ensure identity, communication and accountability?).

Podgorean (RO) refers also to the necessity of stronger political leadership and to a clear statement what the MRS is about. Furthermore it is important to share best practices in order to convince people of the benefits of MRS. Hanak (AT) asked what is expected by the PACs and will it influence the day-to-day implementation. Hanak and Schick (AT) also mention the difficulty of evaluating and presenting concrete results of the EUSDR.

- **Priority Area 9 overall**

Schick (AT) informs the SG members about the results of the 2nd Stakeholder Conference on 5-6 December 2013 in Vienna. About 140 participants (from 13 out of 14 Danube Region countries) dealt i.a. with topics such as improving the transition from school to work, fostering work-based as well as company-based learning and with access to further education. In addition, the conference made clear that efforts should be made towards the establishment of a DR youth platform on formal and non-formal learning. With regard to the issue of increasing qualifications and preventing de-qualification, the field of green jobs and competences was also identified as an interesting area to intensify cooperation. The conference also underlined the necessity of an active participation of all relevant stakeholders from an early stage on. Hanak (AT) adds that the design of an open space conference was an interesting approach even though leading to not so concrete results.

As mentioned by Schick (AT) back-to-back with 2nd Stakeholder Conference a workshop on "Financing Action in the Field of Human Capital in the Danube region" was held on 6 December 2013 in Vienna which dealt with the identification of relevant funds and invited stakeholders to exchange with representatives from various EU programmes (Austrian National Agency for Lifelong Learning, ESF and SEE Joint Technical Secretariats). Hanak (AT) adds that the financial aspect (i.e. source of funding) is vital to the implementation of projects and it should be further pursued by SG members.

Schick (AT) also informs about the participation of PACs at the NCP-PAC Meeting on 11-12 March 2014 in Vienna which discussed i.a. the financial support for the implementation and the EUSDR governance.

- **Working Area 1 "Performance of Education Systems"**

Schick (AT) emphasizes that ERI-SEE continues to be important for the activities of Working Area 1. In the area of VET, in April 2013 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Austria and Romania in order to strengthen the cooperation in vocational education and training. Austria is currently supporting a VET school project with a socio-educational focus of the Concordia Foundation.

Schick (AT) also refers to the relevance of the Central European Cooperation in Education and Training (CECE) which fosters the exchange of expertise and good practice on administration level through joint conferences, seminars and expert workshops. In 2013, the responsible Ministers from Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia signed a new Joint Memorandum with the intent to continue and further their regional and EU-related cooperation in education and training. A coordination meeting on DG level was held on 13-14 February 2014 in Budapest and discussed i.a. the perspectives of future cooperation within CECE and concrete joint activities.

- Project on Work-Based Learning, *Monika Mott*

Mott (AT) informs SG members about the planned project "Enhanced Competitiveness & Employability through Innovative Work-Based Learning in VET" which is being developed by KulturKontakt Austria under the umbrella of Priority Area 9 of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. The projects' aim is i.a. to support the establishment of national and (macro-)regional platforms of dialogue on WBL and the piloting of policy measures at national levels in selected partner countries. The project builds on the work of PA9 VET Working Group coordinated by Romania and should be submitted to the forthcoming ETC Danube Programme. A workshop on WBL will be organized for those countries interested in joining the ETC-application as full and co-financing partners in October 2014.

Faudel (ETF) informs that ETF is planning to launch a WBL project with focus on Eastern Europe in particular Ukraine and Moldova and proposes to join forces in case that the KKA WBL project will start.

- Optimizing the links between labour market and the educational system: modernising the vocational system in Romania, *Zoica Vladut, NCVETD Romania*

Vladut (RO) informs that the initial proposal was referring to the schools networks project (discussions in 2012/13) implemented in Romania. In June 2013 it was decided to focus the topic on WBL (having in mind that discussions started with Baden-Württemberg and this example could be extended to other countries in the Danube Region.) During the last development this initiative was transformed in the project on Attractiveness of VET (so-called "Optimizing the links between [...]") which is included in the Work Area 1. The projects' aim is i.a. the development and promotion of modern education and training programmes for students.

- o **Working Area 2 "Cooperation in Labour Market"**

Hanak (AT) informs that on 9-10 October 2014 a meeting of the working group on social inclusion and fighting poverty with focus on Roma-People is planned.

- o **Working Area 3 "Creativity and Entrepreneurship"**

- Thematic Working Group Creativity and Entrepreneurship, *Christina Kasparyan, Business Support Center for SMEs*

Kasparyan (BG) informs the SG members about the 2nd meeting of the working group on 28 April 2014 in Ruse and about on-going and planned activities. The focus will lie on the identification of new project ideas and the promotion and development of planned projects. Kasparyan (BG) also mentions the link to the South East European Center for Entrepreneurial Learning (SEECLE) as well as to the "i.e.SMART" project.

- Empowering Young People - Connecting Europe, *Monika Mott*

Mott (AT) informs that in June 2013 the project (running from 2012-14) schools shared their project results and experiences at a final event in Vienna. A teacher's guide reflecting the experience, approaches and ideas was developed from October 2013 until May 2014 and then disseminated to participating teachers, teachers from Bosnia-Herzegovina and schools in the region (Link to the portfolio: www.mahara.at/user/kulturkontakt-austria).

- **Working Area 4 "Lifelong Learning and Mobility"**

- etwinning in the Danube Region, *PAC*

Schick (AT) informs about the Thematic Conference on "learning, teaching, exchanging - School cooperations in the Danube Region" which will take place in Vienna on 25-26 June 2014 providing the participants with the opportunity to learn more about the Danube Region and its challenges in the 21st century and to create future partnerships. The seminar organized by the National Agency of Lifelong Learning, the Austrian National eTwinning Support Service and PA9 will contribute to a better understanding of etwinning (www.etwinning.net) and possible cooperations of school in the Danube Region.

- **Working Area 5 "Equity, Social Cohesion, Active Citizenship"**

- Thematic Workshop on Social Inclusion with focus on Roma, *PAC*

Schick (AT) announces that the workshop with the working title "Empowering marginalised groups through education and training / VET in the Danube Region" will take place on 2-3 October 2014 in Vienna. The event is organised by the Austrian Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs, KulturKontakt Austria and the National Agency for Lifelong Learning and shall serve as platform in order to initiate meaningful synergies on the topic Social Inclusion focusing on issues related to the needs of marginalised communities.

- Danube Region Youth Platform, *PAC*

Schick (AT) informs that a "EUSDR Youth Platform" is being developed by the association "Interkulturelles Zentrum Vienna" in cooperation with PA9. The YP is intended to act as a meeting point between formal and non-formal learning institutions to share experiences, map existing projects, enable exchange and project development and explore possible funding opportunities for projects within the EUSDR. A first preparatory meeting will be held in June 2014. The first meeting of the Youth Platform will take place in December 2014 in Vienna.

- **Working Area 6 "Demography and Migration"**

- **Working Area 7 "Poverty and Social Inclusion"**

- **Working Area 8 "To promote gender equality on the labour market, especially in payment"**

- **State of Play and New Initiatives**

Continuation of presentations and discussions

- **Proposal on activities in the area of green competences**
Ad-hoc group on green competences

Liliana Preoteasa, Romanian Ministry of National Education

Following the debates and recommendations of the 2nd Annual Forum of EUSDR in Bucharest on 28-29 October 2013 which confirmed the interest of various stakeholders to work for the sustainable development of the Danube region, Preoteasa (RO) presents the RO proposal to establish an ad-hoc group on green competences under the framework of the Steering Group of PA9. The ad-hoc group will act as a facilitator for knowledge sharing and policy recommendations and will include the following actions:

- Mobilise the interest of the EUSDR participating countries for the topic of green competences
- Mapping the existing initiatives and relevant activities in the region
- Identifying good practices on green competence and debating the possible policy responses
- Ensuring cooperation with the private sector by involving in the work of the group the representatives from sectors that are ready to go green (e.g. construction, tourism, food, agriculture, energy transport, IT)
- Communicate the initiative to the 3rd Annual Forum of the EUSDR in Vienna on 26-27 June 2014
- Support the discussions / debates during the 3rd Stakeholder Conference of PA9 "People and Skills" in Vienna on 6-7 November 2014
- Propose a list of possible actions / policy recommendations to be taken forward by the participating members of the PA 9 steering committee

Radu Jugureanu, on behalf of INTEL, Microsoft and SIVEC
(see attached presentation)

Anastasia Fetsi, European Training Foundation

Fetsi (ETF) mentions that there is no standard term on "green competences" (i.e. there are several kind of understandings what the term comprises). However, green competences are crucial for the future. Therefore, it is necessary to forecast skills (such as green skills) which will be required i.a. by industry in the upcoming years. As an example of collaboration within this field Fetsi (ETF) named the work of ETF within Montenegro. She also mentioned that the first entry point is the economy, whereas the second entry point is the school.

Comments / Questions / Discussion Points

Hanak (AT) suggests that Vladut (RO) should elaborate the proposal in more detail so that SG can decide on it. Schick (AT) comments that in this regard it is also important to have a look at the broader concept and to empower citizens with responsible behaviour. Mott (AT) and Kasparyan (BG) express their interest in the field of green competences. Rolli (GE) suggests to make use of synergies between already existing projects in the field of green competences and of potential new ideas and projects.

Following the discussion the SG Group decides consensually to establish an ad-hoc group that will act as a facilitator for knowledge sharing and policy recommendations
RO is asked to circulate a concept note for the WG for comments.

- **Project development and funding**

Krabatsch (EC) informed that the Danube Programme ETC 2014-2020 is still a draft and in the middle of the programming process. The focus of the new programme will lay on innovation, environment and transport and will also cover the topics of work area PA9. After finishing the programme the Commission will have 3 months time to implement it.

Hanak (AT) is positive about the outcome of the programme and mentioned that it is important to ensure that the topics of education and labour market stay within the programme (also emphasized by Schick). In addition, countries could already start to develop ideas and projects and think about the development about the on-going process.

An important discussion point was the issue of funding, in particular the rate of co-financing. Podgorean (RO) mentioned that partners such as Moldova and Ukraine are not able to cover the co-financing rate. Therefore it is important to look for alternative financial sources.

- **Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects (TAF-DRP)**

Based on the second call of the TAF-DRP PACs inform that SG member were invited and supported regarding the submission of project applications with a clear EUSDR added value. In addition Hanak (AT) informs the SG member about the submission of 3 projects (1 re-submitted project and 2 new projects).

- **Communication Activities of PA 9**

Musterle (AT) mentions that the website is being continuously updated and expanded and it provides a very good overview of the on-going activities of PA9. Although there were some technical issues with the website, it is already available under <http://www.peopleandskills-danuberegion.eu/>. Musterle (AT) informs the participants that a project portfolio is under development and will be presented at the 3rd Annual Forum in Vienna.

- **Annual Forum in Vienna 26-27 June 2014**

The 3rd Annual Forum with the title "We grow together - Together we grow" will be held in Vienna on 26-27 June 2014 and focused on the following three topics: (1) inclusive, sustainable growth as a focus and prerequisite of prosperity, (2) multi-stakeholder European policies for an integrated and competitive Danube region and (3) governance as a criterion of success for the EUSDR, and was organised around four plenary sessions. Topics of PA9 will be strongly represented e.g. through Plenary Session 2 ("danube challenges INVEST IN PEOPLE") which will be introduced by Austrian Federal Minister of Education and Women's Affairs Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek, a workshop on "Investing in inclusive and innovative education and training for better socio-economic outcomes" and also within the Danube Cosmos through several presentations and Speakers' Corner such as EUSDR pilot project Empowering Young People - Connecting Europe, i.e. SMART, CEEPUS etc.

- **Upcoming PA9 Events**

- **3rd Stakeholder Conference of PA9**

Hanak and Schick (AT) inform the SG members that the 3rd Stakeholder Conference of PA9 will be held on 6-7 November 2014 in Vienna. More information will be sent out in due time.

- **Civil Society Forum in Eisenstadt / Austria**

Schick (AT) informs the SG members that "Civil Society Forum Participation Day: Local Actors and Participation" will be held on 25 June 2014 in Eisenstadt which will deal in particular under thematic village "Youth: Education-Participation-Qualification" with topics such as transition between education and labour market, linking formal and non-formal education, competence development of young people etc. The conference is organized by Civil Society Forum in collaboration with PA9 and PA10.

Next SG meetings

Schick and Hanak (AT) suggest holding the next SG meeting in Slovenia, Ljubljana back-to-back with the SEE Annual Event 2014. More information will be sent out in due time.

- **Progress Report to Commission**

The next progress report will be sent to the EC in August 2014.

- **Update Work Plan**

The updated Work Plan is unanimously adopted by the SG.

- **Conclusions**

The meeting was concluded on Friday, 16 May 2014 at 12 o'clock.