

## Minutes of the 9<sup>th</sup> SG Meeting of PA9

**Date:** 28-29 May 2015

**Place:** Hotel Podgorica, Podgorica, Montenegro

**Participants:** see attached list

- **Welcome and Introduction**

Petricevic (NC/ME) welcomes the SG members as National Coordinator of the Danube Region Strategy in Montenegro. Petricevic recognizes the relevance of EUSDR and in particular of PA9 for the development of human resources within Montenegro. Hanak (PAC/AT) and Schick (PAC/AT) welcome the SG members and in particular the new PAC Adriana Roşca (MD, Ministry of Education).

With regard to the overall activities of EUSDR (e.g. establishment of the Danube Strategy Point) Hanak (AT) points out that the Danube Region is characterized i.a. by social disparities and issues causing migration and poverty. In order to foster development of the area activities and events - such as the SG meeting - should take place in the concerned region. Schick (AT) refers to the relevance of education for the overall development of the region and that it remains a focus in funding programmes such as the Danube Transnational Programme 2014-2020. Nevertheless educational systems are facing different challenges within the Danube Region (i.a. provision of relevant skills, ensuring employability, active citizenship and democratic values) which require innovative approaches and collaboration.

Roşca (MD) recognizes the role of the EUSDR as a tool for collaboration and welcomes the opportunity to be more involved and active in the activities of PA9.

- **Adoption of Agenda**

PACs state that the quorum is fulfilled according to the guidelines for the functioning of the Steering Group with 10 out of 14 countries present. Agenda is unanimously adopted by the SG.

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

*Hanak (AT):*

Hanak reports about the situation on the labour market in Austria. The figures from April 2015 show that there are more persons employed (+20.000), but also more persons unemployed (+44.468) in comparison to April 2014. Especially for people with a lower qualification (just compulsory school or apprenticeship) have a high risk to get unemployed. Nevertheless with an unemployment rate of 5,6% (EUROSTAT) Austria has one of the lowest in Europe. The analyses show that there are high dynamics on the Austrian labour market: 237.655 persons find a new job after registered as unemployed. A special focus has to be put on the situation of young unemployed people, because also their number is rising. But there is a broad range of possibilities to integrate them into the labour market. Another emphasis is on elderly unemployed, who can participate in different qualification measures, but also programmes like fit2work.

*Schick (AT):*

Austria is implementing a major structural reform in the education system which will be continued and consolidated in accordance with the governmental work programme 2013-18. The overall policy focus is on both quality and equity. 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. A special emphasis is attached to measures aiming at disadvantaged young people, in particular with a migrant background, through preventive, intervention and compensation measures. Measures concern i.a. the provision of second-chance education and the improvement of adult learning as well as the expansion of all-day school places and the improvement of the school-entry phase, in particular at the interface between kindergartens and primary schools. The ongoing nationwide introduction of the new secondary school ("Neue Mittelschule") has been recently evaluated.

*Kasparyan (BG):*

Bulgaria is pursuing measures i.a. to increase the quality of education and training, to provide equal opportunities and equal access to education and training at all ages for active social inclusion and active civil participation and to follow new educational approaches and innovation in education. In addition, ensuring quality, effectiveness and improving the accessibility of VET are important measures. Moreover, the focus is also set on increasing the employment through quality workforce with skills and competences complying with the requirements of the labor market.

*Bernkopfová (CZ):*

In March 2015 a Novel for Higher Education Institutions was approved by the Czech Government which foresees new rules and changes in the quality assurance and accreditation system of higher education. Furthermore, an evaluation of education quality will be finished in 2015. Main measures concern i.a. to foster inclusive education (in particular related to ROMA pupils), to improve the quality of teachers' education and profile as well as to promote the attractiveness of VET or to tackle the challenge of few kindergartens.

*Roşca (MD):*

Educational issues in the Republic of Moldova are similar to those of other countries in the Danube Region and concern mainly i.a. promoting inclusive education, improving educational quality assurance, development of dual educational system (in cooperation with AT and GE), increase learning mobility and academic mobility within e.g. Erasmus+ and CEEPUS, improvement of qualification recognition and promotion of VET sector. Furthermore, measures are needed to foster employment rate of young / elderly people and to tackle the issue of undeclared work.

*Markovic (CEP / ERI SEE):*

In absence of a RS representative PACs asked the CEP / ERI SEE representatives to report on known priorities in Serbia. Promoting social inclusion and empowering marginalised groups, harmonising the educational system, promoting entrepreneurship at all levels of education, developing an "industrial PhD" (required by the labour market), preventing school dropout and reducing early school leavers, improving teachers' education and promoting school networks are some issues addressed by measures in RS.

*Maravic (HR):*

The Strategy for Education, Science and Technology of the Republic of Croatia was adopted by the Parliament in October 2014. Most important objectives are as follows: comprehensive curricula reform (pre-school/primary and secondary education); extending general compulsory education from 8 to 9 years, improving the quality of management of educational institutions, consistent implementation of the Bologna reform and redefining competencies acquired by higher education programmes, reform of funding of public

higher education institutions (introduction of performance-based funding, improving the student standard and social dimension of higher education, further internationalization of higher education, increasing the participation of adults in life-long learning, establishing a system of quality assurance in adult education).

*Clapan (RO):*

In Romania, the focus is put on i.a. reduction of early school leavers, providing equal opportunities for young and elderly people, reducing unemployment rate (in particular for young people), implementing dual education schemes and increasing VET training, as well as promoting programmes for teachers' education.

*Auxtová (SK):*

In Slovakia, primary concerns deal i.a. with tackling the issue of youth unemployment, introducing dual education systems, enhancing work-based learning and launching a new act for VET, promoting job creation schemes and providing new scholarships (in particular for STEM studies). Adult education and promoting life-long learning programmes are also important measures in Slovakia.

*Tölgyes (HU):*

Hungary is dealing with i.a. improving the performance and quality of education systems, validation and acknowledgment of formal and informal knowledge, promoting adult education, supporting disadvantaged primary and secondary education students, providing equal opportunities and fostering VET training and dual education systems. A focus is put on the increase of employment with an emphasis on marginalized groups. There are active labour market programmes as well as wage subsidization programmes (e.g. for 900.000 people).

*Sucur (ME):*

The focus in Montenegro is put i.a. on increasing the employment rate, reducing regional disparities in employment, promoting entrepreneurship, reducing undeclared work, fighting youth unemployment, supporting better harmonisation of educational systems, providing equal opportunities of vulnerable groups (e.g. Roma, disabled person, women ...), increase the participation in LLL programmes, improving the quality of education and providing more study programmes.

- **State of Play and New Initiatives**
- **EUSDR overall / EC developments**

AJ. Krabatsch (EC) informs that on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2015 the Foreign Ministers of the Danube countries held a meeting in Brussels organised by the current Rotating Chair hold by BW in order to discuss the further implementation and to agree on arrangements in further developing the governance of the EUSDR. A joint statement was adopted where the ministers i.a. welcomed the establishment of the Danube Strategy Point (DSP) hosted by the State of Baden-Württemberg in its Brussels Representation. In this context AJ. Krabatsch (EC) also informs that the recruitment process of the DSP has almost been finalised(1 job opening) and that activities of DSP would start in June 2015. The DSP will facilitate the implementation of the EUSDR. Head of DSP is Matija Vilfan.

AJ. Krabatsch (EC) reports that on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2015 a meeting took place in order to discuss how to include PAs (or PACs) into the upcoming ETC DANUBE Transnational Programme 2014-2020. As far as the issue of implementing a Special Representative (SR) (i.a. issue of funding) for the EUSDR is concerned, the discussion was postponed. NCs decided that

currently this was not a priority and that first the results of the evaluation of the newly established DSP should be analysed.

Finally, AJ. Krabatsch (EC) gives an outlook on further activities / events, e.g. 24-25 June 2015 NC-PAC Meeting in the framework of a Floating Conference to discuss i.a. the work programme of the DSP as well as the Technical Assistance (TA) for 2015/16; the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Forum on 29-30 October 2015 in Ulm/Baden-Württemberg. She also informs that DG REGIO had organised a meeting with DG JRC, RTD, EMPL and EAC at Directors Level in order to mobilise participation and active support For the implementation of macroregional strategies.

Hanak (AT) comments that it would be beneficial if the DSP had been established in the region, and not in Brussels at the Permanent Representation of Baden-Württemberg. He concludes that in order to boost development within the region, each form of investment (e.g. events or establishment of such an office) should therefore be made in the region. Hanak (AT) further comments that TA was successfully prolonged till July 2015. He also mentions that the new TA and the contract are issues to be discussed on the upcoming Floating Conference on 24-25 June 2015.

- **Priority Area 9 overall**

Schick (AT) informs that a PAC meeting related to the evaluation of TAF-DRP and START took place in Vienna on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2015. Furthermore, he mentions that the Brussels meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2015 was focussed on the development of selection criteria for applications in order to ensure that projects with a strong macro-regional and EUSDR related topic will be selected. However, PACs will not be involved in the assessment of the future applications. Furthermore Schick (AT) states that currently it is not yet clear in which way the newly established DSP will effectively support the PACs in their efforts. Schick (AT) welcomes the activities of DG Regio mentioned by Krabatsch (EC) towards a stronger involvement of other relevant DGs as this was already stated by the PACs as a necessary step towards a better implementation of the Strategy.

*Danube Connects, Adriana Roşca*

The overall aim of the project is to strengthen the capacities of Moldovan institutions at central, regional and local level to participate in European development projects by creating an efficient coordination system at national level of the initiatives / programmes / instruments addressing regional development and cross-border cooperation issues. Expected results are i.a. national structures for coordination and implementation of EUSDR as well as national system for management and control of regional and cross-border cooperation programmes for the period 2014-2020. The project runs from February 2015 till January 2018 and is supported by the Austrian Development Cooperation.

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

*Project on Work-Based Learning, Jürgen Schick*

The planned project "Enhanced Competitiveness and Employability through Innovative Work-Based Learning in VET" continues the work of the previous PA9 VET Working Group coordinated by Romania. It aims i.a. at supporting the establishment of national and (macro-)regional platforms of dialogue on WBL and is led by KulturKontakt Austria (KKA) together with the Romanian TVET Centre which are continuing the elaboration of the planned project.

*International Conference and Experts Group Meeting on Green Competences for Ecotourism in the Danube Region, Carmen Clapan*

Clapan (RO) reminds that based on a proposal by the Romanian Ministry of National Education and the National Centre for TVET Development, an experts group on green competences was established in the framework of the 8<sup>th</sup> Steering Group Meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2014 in Vienna. The activities of the experts group are focussed on i.a. to explore the emerging needs in "green competences" and priorities for developing respective vocational education and training provisions in the Danube Region. The main aim is the elaboration of a joint application for a TVET international project in the field of green competences for Ecotourism in the Danube Region. For this reason an International Conference on "Green Competences in Ecotourism for the Danube Region" took place on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2015 in Comana followed by a first meeting of the experts group on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2015 in Bucharest. The aim of the events was to inform about the proposed activities and to gather stakeholders interested in joining the project.

Schick (AT) comments that the event will also create links and synergies with PA3 "Culture and tourism" and PA6 "Biodiversity, landscape and soil".

*ERI-SEE Work Programme 2015, Jasminka Markovic*

Markovic (RS) informs that ERI SEE is a regional platform for cooperation in the field of education and training and that since the second half of 2010 the Centre for Education Policy (CEP) acts as the ERI SEE Interim Secretariat. Some of the key ERI SEE achievements are i.a. the establishment of institutional networks of VET centres which allows for exchange of best-practice examples and knowledge sharing. ERI SEE activities for 2015-16 will focus i.a. on thematic areas such as ensuring quality education through teacher education, removing obstacles to recognition of qualifications or strengthening the vocational education and training systems. For instance, a regional workshop on "Teacher Education and Training" was held on 22-23 January 2015 in Tirana.

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

*Bilateral Labour Market Cooperation Austria-Moldova, Barbara Willsberger*

Willsberger (AT) informs the participants about activities of the project "Bilateral Labour Market Cooperation Austria-Moldova". The aim of the project is to inform relevant actors about labour market structure and the improvement of chances for unemployed people in the Republic of Moldova through qualification in the construction sector. This project is related to the ADA-Project "Building Academy in Moldova" which gives unemployed young people the chance of a qualification within the dual system in the construction sector.

*KOOP Austria-Ukraine, Monika Natter*

Natter (AT) informs the steering group members about the project "KOOP Austria-Ukraine - Bilateral Labour Market Cooperation March 2013 to February 2015". The cooperation partners are the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (BMASK) and the Ukrainian Ministry of Social Policy (MSP). The aim of the project is to establish a network with relevant Ukrainian labour market policy actors (Ministries, Public Employment Services, Social Partners, qualification providers etc.) and to address current Ukrainian labour market policy issues and challenges. There should be a transfer of knowledge and experience and a forum for discussion and exchange for experts should be provided. Within the project was a support for the Ukrainian efforts to adapt regulations and structures to EU standards.

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

*START Project Danube Competence Centres for Creativity and Entrepreneurship, Christina Kasparyan*

The project is led by the Business Support Centre for Small and Medium Enterprises (BSC-SME in Ruse) and comprises 6 participating countries (AT, BG, CZ, HU, MD and RO). The aim of the project is to establish a Danube Competence Centres for Creativity and Entrepreneurship that will represent a network for exchange of practices, transfer of approaches to foster creativity and entrepreneurship, development of new curricula or trainings, advice and research on emerging industries and anticipating necessary skills for the future. Expected results are i.a. a detailed project concept and budget for the establishment of such a centre.

*Working Group 3 Meeting in May 2015, Christina Kasparyan*

The 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the working group "Creativity and Entrepreneurship" was held on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2015 in Bucharest. It assembled participants from BG, HU, MD, ME and RO. It discussed funding opportunities for the WG project ideas and initiatives and informed about expected calls for proposals. It also dealt with possible ideas for further cooperation.

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

*START Project Milestones of Learning Development (MLD), Jürgen Schick*

The project MLD aims at improving and enhancing the work of SEEYN regarding life-long learning activities by identifying needs and requirements of users, establishing relevant partnerships, developing action plan and specific projects. It is coordinated by the South East European Youth Network and comprises six participating countries (BA, BG, HR, HU, RS and SI). The primary target groups are NGOs, institutions for non-formal education, educators, trainers and mentors. The grant agreement is already signed.

*OeAD Workshop on strategic partnerships School-to-School Cooperation and etwinning, Jürgen Schick*

A follow-up conference on "Learning, Teaching, Exchanging - School Cooperation in the Danube Region" will take place on 18-19 June 2015 in Vienna. The conference will be organised by the National Agency of Life-Long Learning in cooperation with PA9. The event will provide participants with the opportunity to learn more about the Danube Region and its challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to create future partnerships. In particular, participants will learn more about the eTwinning platform and discuss the issue of "Cooperation between schools in the Danube Region" in four workshops.

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

*Danube Peace Boat, Miomir Rajcevic*

The project is coordinated by the Media Education Centre which is working for years in the area of media, information and peace literacy in the Region aiming at the promotion of new intercultural and interactive tools in education for children and youth. The objective of the project is i.a. to provide students and teachers with skill and knowledge in media by establishing cooperation between schools and organization with the background of media / information in different countries. Expected results are i.a. that participants have developed and produced unique blogs, radio or TV reports etc. on a wide range of social, educational, cultural and environmental topics. Finally, all results will be disseminated

through the Danube Peace Boat Network Platform-website and through local media. The following countries are involved: Austria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia and Serbia.

*EUSDR Youth Platform, Jürgen Schick*

The objectives of this initiative are i.a. to serve as a meeting point between formal and non-formal learning institutions to share experiences and good practice projects of cross-sectoral cooperation between formal and non-formal learning institutions, to foster sharing of ideas and project development and to explore possible funding opportunities within Erasmus+, the Danube Transnational 2014-2020 or other funding instruments. In December 2014 a first EUSDR Youth Platform "Learning Pathways to Social Cohesion" took place in Vienna providing space for discussion and exchanging experience. A second platform is envisaged for autumn 2015. The initiative will be also presented during the Annual Forum 2015 in Ulm.

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

*SEEMIG, Barbara Willsberger*

Willsberger (AT) reports on behalf of the University of Vienna about the activities of the project "SEEMIG: Managing Migration and its Effects in SEE - Transnational Actions towards Evidence Based Strategies". In this multi-level partnership 18 research institutes, universities, NGOs, local municipalities from 8 SEE countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia) were active. The aims were a better understanding of long term migration, human capital and demographic processes of South-East Europe, their effects on labour markets, national and regional economies, to empower public administrations to develop and implement policies and strategies by using enhanced datasets and empirical evidence. More information is available under the following link [www.seeming.eu](http://www.seeming.eu).

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

*Fostering Institutional Capacity for Roma Integration, Roland Hanak*

Hanak (AT) reports on Working Area 7 "Poverty and Social Inclusion": There was an event in Vienna on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2014 called "Fostering Institutional Capacity for Roma Integration in the Danube Region". The aim was to inform ROMA-NGOs about funding possibilities and there were about 70 people from the region. A further meeting is envisaged next year.

Furthermore an ESF-Call for Roma-Empowerment was launched in Austria. There is a broad Roma community in Austria, especially in Vienna, and about 7 to 8 projects are planned in the next three years.

- **Funding of projects and PA9 activities**

Gabriel (Joint Secretary in Budapest, JS) presented the draft programme of the upcoming ETC DANUBE Transnational Programme 2014-2020. The cooperation programme (CP) will cover the same geographical area as the EUSDR and it will be financed through ERDF, IPA and maybe ENI. A launching conference will be held in the second half of September 2015. The CP comprises four Priority Axes, of which Axis 1 "Innovative and socially responsible Danube Region" deals with topics related to activities of PA9. It is divided into two specific objectives (SO), namely SO 1.1 "Improve framework conditions for innovation" and SO 1.2 "Increase competences for business and social innovation". The latter addresses i.a. issues such as improved policies and practical solutions for entrepreneurial culture and learning

or joint educational offers. Direct linkages between the EUSDR and PA9 exist, moreover, through Specific Objective 4.1 “Improve Institutional Capacity to tackle major societal needs”, which is addressing topics like migration, human capital, inclusion vulnerable groups and educational as well as labour market implications related to it. Gabriel (JS) mentions that each DTP thematic priority has clear linkages to one or more EUSDR PA but not each EUSDR PA is equally reflected by the DTP thematic portfolio. In addition, Gabriel (JS) also informs that an "assessment grid" for evaluating projects' contributions to EUSDR is being developed in cooperation with PACs. Regarding the first call for the programme which is envisaged for September 2015 it will be based on a two step approach and open for all PAs.

Kasparyan (BG) asks if there is a limit in number of partners. Gabriel (JS) responses that the minimum is 3 partners and that there is no maximum formal limit, but the partnership should comprise around 10 partners hereby ensuring a good cover of the geographical area. The project duration is maximum 30 months.

Maravic (HR) asks if there is a limit of budget. Gabriel (JS) responses that there is no formal limitation but that according to past experiences project budgets range from 1 - 5 Mio EUR, depending on the topic and scope (e.g. number of project partners) of a project.

Hanak (AT) asks if the co-financing rate of 15% must be public money. Gabriel (JS) answers that the co-financing rate can be financed through public money but this is not compulsory, depending on national regulations..

ERDF funding is foreseen for AT, BG, CZ, DE, HU, RO, SK and SI. IPA funding is foreseen for BA, ME and RS. ENI funding (for UA and MD only) is still under discussion for the 1<sup>st</sup> Call. Gabriel (JS) also mentions that UA and MD can participate within the CP as associate strategic partners.

Schick (AT) asks if the lead partner must be a member state which Gabriel (JS) confirms. In addition, Gabriel (JS) mentions that it would be beneficial if lead partner had proven experience in managing such projects.

- **Communication Activities**

Musterle (PA9/KKA) informs the SG members that due to technical issues (no technical support by GroupSpaces, technical issues with access) the website of PA9 had to be re-launched in February 2015. It remains available under <http://www.peopleandskills-danuberegion.eu/>. The website is still being continuously updated and expanded and it provides a very good overview of the on-going activities of PA9. Moreover, due to the success of the first edition of the EUSDR PA9 project portfolio, a second edition was published in July 2015 that provides an overview of current and planned initiatives and activities as well as of selected finished projects of PA9.

- **4<sup>th</sup> Annual Forum on 29-30 October 2015 in Ulm, Preview of the Programme + PA9 Contributions and Workshops**

AJ. Krabatsch (EC) presents the draft programme of the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Forum of the EUSDR which will take place on 29-30 October 2015 in Ulm, Baden-Württemberg. This years' forum will put the focus on three thematic sessions (external impact of the strategy, innovation and entrepreneurship + professional training), but will also provide space for several side events such as 2<sup>nd</sup> Participation Day of the Civil Society Forum (CSF) or the Young Danube (an exhibition to the spring of the river Danube). Krabatsch (EC) also mentions that a horizontal link between PA7, PA8 and PA9 would be most welcome. Next



steps in the preparation of the forum are to send out a save-the-date at the end of May. More detailed information should be provided to PACs in the framework of the Floating Conference on 24-25 June 2015.

Hanak and Schick (AT) comment that draft proposals of several PA9 contributions (3 proposals for workshop, 2 proposals for thematic session interventions) were already sent to the organisers of this event. Detailed information (e.g. date, time slot, room size etc. which are necessary data in order to further work on PA9 contributions) from the organisers are still missing. PACs inform to continue work on PA9 contributions as soon as they receive further information from organisers. Finally, Hanak and Schick (AT) invite SG members to send their ideas / proposal for possible projects / speakers till 5<sup>th</sup> June 2015.

Hanak (AT) welcomes conditionally the idea of Krabatsch (EC) to interconnect activities of PA7, PA8 and PA9 within the Annual Forum. He states that such a common approach is only valuable in case that the added value of such cooperation is clear and that work load and its implementation are manageable.

- **Progress Report to Commission**

SG members are invited to send their contribution to the progress report till Friday, 26<sup>th</sup> June 2015. The next progress report will be sent to the EC in September 2015.

- **Upcoming PA9 Events**

PACs will attend the upcoming NC-PAC meeting on 24-25 June 2015 in the framework of a Floating Conference. The next SG meeting will be tentatively held in autumn 2015 after the AF in the Republic of Moldova. PA9 will actively participate through several contributions at the upcoming 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Forum on 29-30 October 2015 in Ulm, Baden-Württemberg.

- **Update Work Plan**

The updated Work Plan is unanimously adopted by the SG.

- **Conclusions**

The meeting was concluded on Friday, 29 May 2015 at 13 o'clock.